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Article (Accepted Version)

Haynes, Douglas (2019) “Falling into the sky”: gravity and levity in Pynchon’s *Mason & Dixon*. *Space and Culture*. ISSN 1206-3312 (Accepted)

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“Falling into the Sky”: Gravity and Levity in Pynchon’s *Mason
& Dixon*

For the Special Issue: Above: Degrees of Elevation

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Word count, inc notes and refs: 7970

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Abstract:

My argument follows geographer Gunnar Olsson when he asks “What is geography if it is not the drawing and interpreting of a line? And what is the drawing of a line if it is not also the creation of new objects?” Using Thomas Pynchon’s 1997 novel *Mason & Dixon* about the drawing of the Mason-Dixon line, I explore how the mapmaker’s productive power is never merely reflective but generative too, constructing a world as much as representing one. I question the consequent relation between “above and below,” drawing on Farinelli’s insight that critique of such constructions must recognise an antagonistic humour in the production of maps and territories. Pynchon’s novel, I argue, is exemplary in the wit with which it pits the anomalous, strange and contingent phenomena of the below against the homogenising, categorising power of above. His approach helps us understand the dark heart of Enlightenment cartography and society.

Keywords: Pynchon; cartography; Enlightenment; humour; space; slavery; L.E.D.

“[T]o be a solar Eye, looking down like a god. The exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive: the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more” (Certeau, 1984, p. 92).

Describing the now-impossible experience of looking down to the streets from the observation deck on the 110th floor of the World Trade Centre in New York City, Michel de Certeau, in his evocative “Walking in the City,” from *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), wonders what this lofty and exhilarating perspective actually *prevents* us from seeing. In his vision of the city opened-up, made legible as an “immense texturology” (p. 92), what is the cost of such apparent omniscience, or “phallic verticality,” as Henri Lefebvre might say (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 36). What is effaced or rendered invisible when we perceive a world so scaled-down, laid out flat, broken open? And what happens to the self that sees in such a way? Indeed, what kind of self finds itself seeing in that kind of way?

These questions are important ones when it comes to being above, feeling above, or producing a sense of what we might call *aboveness*, all of which form topics for this special issue. The present essay argues that a complex relation exists between the above and the below, suggesting in fact they are a dialectical pair, one always involved with the other, and communicating across a space both physical and conceptual. I use cartology as a means to understand these positions, regarding them finally as both formed and linked through their relationship to power, and, perhaps surprisingly, I consider *humour* too as a way to navigate and critique conceptions of verticality, especially through the play of levity and gravity.

Both these broad topics are located in readings of Thomas Pynchon’s most cartological novel, *Mason & Dixon* (1997, henceforth *MD*), where notions of the vertical and horizontal, as well as Pynchon’s near-Foucauldian will-to-humour tie these themes together. David Seed observes that “[m]apping has remained a constant preoccupation throughout Pynchon’s fiction” (Seed, 2012, p. 113), but it is in *Mason & Dixon* that Pynchon’s cartographic concerns are most evident. Set chiefly in the 1760s, when the eponymous boundary was commissioned to divide Pennsylvania from Maryland, and narrated by the anachronistically named Rev^d Wicks Cherrycoke, the horizontal “Line” (always capitalised in Pynchon’s *faux* eighteenth-century style) is the novel’s central and controlling motif. Indeed, as

Samuel Cohen points out, it is where almost all *Mason & Dixon* critics begin (Cohen, 2002, p. 266), and Pedro García-Caro goes so far as to see the Line as in fact the novel's "real protagonist" (García-Caro, 2005, p. 103). Various referred to in Pynchon's text as an Entity (p. 650), a scar (p. 542), a great invisible Thing (p. 651), a conduit for Evil (p. 701), and much else besides, the Line as a remarkable and historically resonant work of civil engineering becomes in the narrative a linear and cartographic figure paradigmatic not just of scientific Enlightenment as the latter conquers nature – a leading edge of modernity – but for Enlightenment's dialectical obverse: the activities of Empire, colony, and Atlantic slave trade as they link to a growing industrial capitalism. In particular, Pynchon's work exposes the blindness of Enlightenment to its own bloody conditions of possibility. Encountering slavery in the British colonies of South Africa, St Helena and colonial North America, Dixon uses spatial metaphors of displacement and burial to convey a double-thinking sense of how slavery survives, as he feels "doom'd to re-encounter thro' the World this public secret, this shameful Core.... Pretending it to be ever somewhere else [. . .]" (*MD*, p. 692), an insight that I argue Pynchon uses humour to convey. Equally, however, in Pynchon's novel, we encounter the Line as Certeau's solar Eye: a projection of epistemological power from above.

Given its later role as the territorial divide between free and slaveholding states, the Mason-Dixon Line makes for a darkly convenient transhistorical image here too. For "[w]hat is geography", critical geographer Gunnar Olsson asks us, "if it is not the drawing and interpreting of a line? And what is the drawing of a line if it is not also the creation of new objects?" (Olsson, 1991, *np*). In these references to the productive power of the mapmaker, working from above, we find my argument *in nuce*. Inscriptions from above – cartographical, categorical, writerly – are never merely reflective but generative too, sometimes unconsciously so; they construct a world as much as they represent one. Yet whatever is below may yet resist such determination, as we shall see in the case of Pynchon's novel, which pits the anomalous, the strange and the contingent and below (comprehensible also as the preterite, or passed-over, to cite a term used frequently in Pynchon's idiom) against the homogenising, categorising power of above.

In fact, geographer Franco Farinelli insists, in Pynchonian vein, that our understanding of the physical world – our sense of cartographic aboveness – must

always be mediated via a kind of *Witz*, or wit; in particular, the pun, which undermines the authority of aboveness. Alexander von Humboldt, the great nineteenth-century geographer, Farinelli tells us, “believed that the concept of landscape was based on the double entendre” (Farinelli, 1999, p. 39). Humboldt’s view, he says, resembles Freud’s theory of wit, where humorous pleasure derives from multiple meanings extracted from the same material. Freud’s puns are hence also examples of irony, we might note, recalling linguist V. N. Vološinov’s useful definition of irony as an “encounter in one voice of two incarnate value judgements and their interference with one another” (Vološinov (1976), p. 113). For Farinelli, any representation of landscape - indeed, the historical concept of landscape itself - is tense with just this comic, ironic ambiguity as multiple groups and ideologies compete to define it, or express themselves through it. He describes, for example, the transition from feudal maps which show only the aristocratic ownership of land, entirely *sans* nature, to the maps of the bourgeois Enlightenment, based on natural science, and which contest and redraw earlier meanings of the world, trickily displacing the claims of the *ancien regime* by prioritising “natural” phenomena. The bourgeois professionalised scientist cuts away the very grounds of feudal hierarchy, reopening the latter space for appropriation; each hegemon seeks to capture and define space in its own image. As Farinelli suggests, it is in the space of “the word” or in discourse that this struggle really takes place (Farinelli, p. 43).

Elizabeth Hinds, a consistently acute commentator on Pynchon, notices subversively witty landscapes in all his novels, noting that puns “transfigure [Pynchon’s] natural landscape; [a] supernatural effect [that] comes from the will of language itself, language made palpable through visible and readable signs” (Hinds, 2000, p. 24). For her, the energy of the writer’s puns resists semantic or narrative entropy, conjuring a hybridic, germinal, and open textual landscape. But following Farinelli’s sense of the comic tension through which cartological meanings are derived, we might regard the playful, punning landscapes of *Mason & Dixon* as finally *political*: the result of profound historical antagonism and contradiction.

Pynchon’s novel uses the two central protagonists as a key way to animate the relation of above to below. *Mason & Dixon* follows astronomer Charles Mason

and surveyor Jeremiah Dixon on a number of assignments, principally as they chart the transits of Venus across the sun from various locations around the world, attempting to measure distances in the solar system, and of course as they draw the Mason-Dixon line from Maryland to Ohio. Already we see that their respective professions connote an unusually benign and productive relationship between above and below: the astronomer's stargazing works alongside the terrestrial gaze of the surveyor to measure and create spaces and lines. As Mason notes, late in the narrative, "Stars and Mud, ever conjugate, a Paradox to consider" (*MD*, 749). But typically for Pynchon's oeuvre, it is veiled higher powers who actually commission the duo's work: whoever pulls the strings in the Royal Society, for example, or the proto-corporate East India Company (*MD*, p. 479, et al), the Sino-Jesuits, an (obviously Smithian) "Invisible Hand" (*MD*, p. 411), or darker, more mystical agents in colonial America (*MD*, p. 605). Mason and Dixon, the novel implies, are lowly workers in a more elevated game. So, although commemorated in the name of the Line, from the perspective of posterity, the two men and their extraordinary experiences are effaced by the very mapping they create: the below is all but snuffed out by the above. As Certeau suggests, once the work of mapping is done, it is the map that "remains alone on the stage. The tour describers have disappeared" (Certeau, p. 121). Pynchon's peripatetic, picaresque novel hence sets out to recover something of Mason and Dixon's preterite experiences, his text a repository of their otherwise lost and often fantastical journey along the Line.

Key to the transformations enacted during the Enlightenment of Pynchon's novel is a recasting of the basic axes of time and space, rendering them instrumentalised products of modernity. Early in the narrative, a direct equation is drawn between science, capital, time, and space:

"Time, ye see," says the Landlord, "is the money of Science, isn't it. The Philosophers need a Time, common to all, as Traders do a common coinage."

"Suggesting as well an Interest, in those events which would occur in several parts of the Globe at the same Instant."

"Like in the Book of Revelations?"

"Like the Transit of Venus, *eh Mr. Mason?*" (*MD*, p. 192)

This brief, telling exchange, which sounds faintly like ribald bar room banter, faintly like a threat (“*eh, Mr Mason?*”), partially concerns the official “theft” of eleven days in 1752 when Britain shifted from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar already used by the rest of Europe. In order to synchronise with the continental mainland, the British calendar passed directly from September 2nd to the 14th, occasioning in *Mason & Dixon* a comic-Gothic episode in Oxford for Mason, who is left behind in an eleven-day temporal “vortex” while the rest of the nation leaps forward to the new date. Although an amusing thought experiment in the novel, based on an unusual historical moment, what this episode underlines is the supplanting of a cyclical pre-modern time, if I may be so lapsarian, with a time that can be ordered and monopolised. The Europeans force the Brits onto the Gregorian calendar in a (now)-comic displacement not unlike Farinelli’s narration of the bourgeois-scientific appropriation of space. As the Landlord implies, modern time becomes the commodity of commodities, to use a Marxian parlance, or a “universal equivalent” like gold (Marx, 1976, p. 162), with which everything may be measured. In modernity, time is a quantity rather than diffuse “natural” duration. Time is a *thing*, as the weavers “paid tuppence for eight hours work” (*MD*, p. 407) in the background of the novel will attest to as well.

The Landlord and Mason’s exchange also refers to the much-vaunted and associated notion of a “spatial turn” (see Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (1974); Soja, *Postmodern Geographies* (1989), et al.), or the sense that space too is not just a matter of Euclidean or Newtonian dimensionality but the product and medium of social practices and conflicts as well. How does a sacred space differ from a secular one, for example? How does Certeau, at the top of the WTC experience Manhattan space differently to those on the ground? What even constitutes a space? What kind of space is a map? A dream? A novel?

In their short conversation, the Landlord, for his part, alludes expansively to the new universal space of the planet, wherein related Events may happen at the same Instant, an apprehension of which was previously the province only of the God of Revelation, who occupies a space very much “above.” Indeed, a lot of business is made of the synchronisation of global time to underwrite global space in Pynchon’s novel, as talking clocks, complaining of “Horologick ailments” (*MD*,

p. 121) gained aboard ship, are carried around the planet to calibrate astronomical activities.

So what Mary Louise Pratt in her *Imperial Eyes* (2008) coins “planetary consciousness,” thinking of the eighteenth-century global diffusion of the Linnaean taxonomy of natural science (which will be important below) is paralleled, then, in *Mason & Dixon* by the more literally planetary events of the observations of the Transits of Venus that Mason and/or Dixon and others undertake in St Helena, Cape Town, Ulster, and Norway. It is with the parallax measurements of Venus crossing the Sun that the calculation of the real numerical dimensions of the solar system were first attempted in 1761 and then 1769. If the Apollo 8 astronauts were so wowed by seeing Earth for the first time as a whole, vulnerable blue planet, in 1968 – the ultimate above, surely – some of the etymology of that moment lies in the observations undertaken in the second half of the eighteenth century when the Earth becomes a definite body in measured space: knowable, penetrable, and manipulable. And surely it is no coincidence either that this first “high planetary” moment – if one excludes the moment of the aliens who leave ancient messages for astronomers in old Welsh in *Mason & Dixon* (*MD*, p. 600) – is also a high moment of Empire. Ironically, a sense of the planetary is achieved exactly alongside processes of trade, conquest, and subjection.

Within the grid of Newtonian space that Mason and Dixon occupy, however, *displacements* are possible, or even enabled as a conceptual space. Pratt argues that the taxonomical order within which Enlightenment knowledge is codified is a form of abstraction and remapping, a practice especially clear in the case of Linnaean natural history in the period of colonisation. “The eighteenth-century classificatory systems created the task of locating every species on the planet, extracting it from its particular, arbitrary surroundings,” she writes, “and placing it in its appropriate spot in the system (the order-book, collection, or garden) with its new written, secular European name” (Pratt, 2008, p. 31). Such a transposition and translation of objects to a new graphic, spatial, and epistemological locale, and a new symbolic, linguistic, and actual ground, reorders and remaps the world, privileging a Western systematic and abstract understanding over historically felt experiences of place and habitus, and erasing a sense of the alterity of objects.

Here again is the sense of the above noted earlier here. Like Certeau's comments from "Walking in the City", classificatory Enlightenment knowledge is understood here as an *overview*, the production and organisation of which depends on power, and which takes symptomatic forms like the survey and the map. One might think of Foucault's famous reading of Borges' Chinese Encyclopaedia, which illustrates how taxonomical power operates: the fictional document divides animals into absurd categories: "(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous," etc (Foucault, 1970, p. xvi). "Borges adds no figure to the atlas of the impossible; nowhere does he strike the spark of poetic confrontation; he simply dispenses with the least obvious, but most compelling, of necessities; he does away with the *site*," Foucault writes (1970, p. xviii). Deprived of any concrete spatial referent, this "atlas of the impossible" (which aptly describes *Mason & Dixon* too) does not exist in any naturalistic way at all, it persists as a system ordering reality, no matter how comedic or nonsensical. Like the abstracted garden of which Pratt writes, the system *is* the site, the system *makes* the site. As we shall see in the American mapping of the Line in Pynchon's novel, this system of nature and its cartological cognates tends also to blot out other knowledges. Scientific classification "overwrote local and peasant ways of knowing within Europe just as it did local indigenous ones abroad", Pratt notes (2008, p. 35), an observation that is certainly true of the Americas and to which Pynchon consistently returns in his oeuvre (see Freer, 2018).

In *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon's critique of a systematised nature and the production of aboveness takes two main approaches. The drawing of the Line is the first, regarded in many senses as a romantic and lapsarian desecration of wilderness; Captain Zhang declares that "to make a right Line upon the Earth is to inflict upon the Dragon's very Flesh, a sword-slash" (*MD*, p. 542), conjuring a living Earth as Dragon and counterpoising the irregularity of natural landscape with the mathematical "right Line." It is already clear that a language of geometry will straighten the edges of nature, redrawing territories to serve new purposes. But prior to a consideration of this, let's examine the other approach: Pynchon's unusual bestiary, and how it enacts a resistance to codification and develops a humour too.

Thinking of all the strange flora and fauna in the text, like the Swiftian giant vegetables of the Gardens Titanick; Zapho Beck, the were-beaver; Felipe the Electric Eel; and all the rest, Lee Rozelle, following Hinds, considers Pynchon's novel to be inherently hybridic and open - a protean "means to reincorporation, to reconsider prescriptive representations of flora and fauna as well as erase the conceptual lines separating *Homo sapiens* and our fellow terrestrial life forms" (Rozelle, 2013, p. 164), he writes. Yet while rigid taxonomy is certainly a target of Pynchon's critique, perhaps the hybrid is not the model with which to best approach systems of Enlightenment codification; Pynchon, I argue, prefers the *anomaly*, as the "eleven days" episode, noted above, clearly shows. The anomaly recalls Farinelli's pun, where different discourses compete to claim and shape the same phenomena, and greater dissonances inevitably arise. *Mason & Dixon* is filled with anomalies: not just those supernumerary British days - which the Julian calendar simply won't let go of - one might also point to the Delaware Wedge - the bizarre (and historically real) product of necessary mathematical inconsistency in surveying the Delaware/Pennsylvania boundaries, a space which contains "an Unseen World, beyond Resolution, of transactions never recorded" and which is populated by elves (not necessarily historically real) (*MD*, p. 470). Rather than accommodate these unusual realities in a hybridic continuum, Pynchon, I argue, deploys them as humorous devices that help us recognise and question the validity of the categories that produce, or fail to produce them. These are examples of the "below" in the sense of phenomena that test the categorical grid, and which may also appear somewhat *excessive* to it.

My favourite example is that of the Learned English Dog: a beast, which in doggerel (sorry), expounds his areas of expertise in a Portsmouth pub. Through the L.E.D., as this luminous animal is referred to, we see the Enlightenment construction of nature stretched to its categorical limits, as well as the intertwinement of the culture of reason with colony and empire as Pynchon uses the Dog to allude to the transatlantic slave trade. In fact, Pynchon's use of the Learned English Dog refers to a clutch of historically real, tavern-based learned dog acts appearing throughout mid-eighteenth to early nineteenth century England (see online Kings College London project, *Classics and Class*). The Dog

speaks to the book's eponymous characters on the question of whether dogs have souls, offering the following:

[. . .] please do not come to the Learned English Dog if it's religious Comfort you're after. I may be præternatural, but I am not supernatural. 'Tis the Age of Reason, rrrf? There is ever an Explanation at hand, and no such thing as a Talking Dog,— Talking Dogs belong with Dragons and Unicorns. What there are, however, are provisions for Survival in a World less fantastic (*MD*, p. 22).

The distinction between preternatural and supernatural is a fine one. In terms of the newly-applied categories of nature, the L.E.D. argues that he is an outlying, or preternatural case of doggishness, *not* a mythical beast *outside* categorisation in the wilds beyond nature. He does not have non-doglike qualities. But by arguing reasonably, of course, he is talking himself out of business. This is Schopenhauer's notion of humorous incongruity – where the idea of a thing fails to represent the thing itself – on permanent loop. The Dog's proximity to ordinary animality – "'Tis the Age of Reason, rrrf?" – literally mixes reason with the bark of a dog, recalling Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's notion from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) that rationality and its other are susceptible to swapping over, the iron cage of reason resembling all too well the blind mechanism of nature (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1972, p. 12). Yet each canine word here is still an ironic, humorous elevation over doghood, a Farinellian pun about who defines doghood, or who defines nature – a pun that the L.E.D.'s story elaborates more fully.

The Dog's "Provisions for Survival in a World less fantastic" – one that's been secularised and taxonomised – are hence a high-wire act of their own. To avoid human predation, dogs, we discover, have become more human-facing – what Deleuze and Guattari call territorialised or Oedipalised; none more so than the L.E.D., who actually talks:

So we know how to evoke from you, Man, one day at a time, at least enough Mercy for one more day of Life. Nonetheless, however accomplish'd, our

Lives are never settled,— we go on as Tail-wagging Scheherazades [. . .] (*MD*, p. 22).

These tense daily performances nevertheless squeeze a humour and a humanness from dogs, the stakes of which are that failure entails death: it's a tough gig, Enlightenment, full of inhuman discipline.

In his 1927 essay "Humour", Freud describes humour as a "refusal to suffer", an "elevating" attitude, able, he says, to elude "the traumas of the external world" (Freud, 1927, p. 126). He compares it to the paternal view, the superego, "above" the ego:

We obtain a dynamic explanation of the humorous attitude, therefore, if we conclude that it consists in the subject's removing the accent from his own ego and transferring it on to his super-ego. To the super-ego, thus inflated, the ego can appear tiny and all its interests trivial, and with this fresh distribution of energy it may be an easy matter for it to suppress the potential reactions of the ego (p. 128).

Humour for Freud is hence about upward-ness, splitting oneself and connecting to the superego as the site of lawfulness, language, and social reality. In fact, Freud's paradigmatic example of humour is gallows humour: the condemned man who, led out to execution, comments that "this is a nice way to start the week," a joke cited both in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) and "Humour." Elevated to language, the condemned man's predicament is lightened and, as Simon Critchley quips, "the superego is your amigo" (Critchley, 2003, p. 102). Hence, through a perverse identification with structures of discursive power — in which the breach between nature, such as the instinct to survive, and sociality has already been "healed" — the man achieves an externalising self-objectification, a laughter at the self. But it is hard to pin the joke down, finally: is the pivotal moment the abjection of the condemned man's self-reflection, or the cruelty of the laws to which he cleaves so faithfully? Or do these positions somehow cross over? The height of the comedy – the levity it needs to rise above circumstances – is both threatened and facilitated by the gravity exercised by

imminent death: the limit that discourse defers. Thinking of the Romantic poets' fondness for the balloon as an image for poetry, Will May tells us that "[t]he poet-ballooning is someone with a desire to go further and higher than they should, who will use any means necessary to stay in the air, even if it means a crash landing" (May, 2017, p. 11), a figure we might find helpful for the humourist too.

Similarly lofty aspirations may be found with the Learned English Dog, who, like Kafka's ape Rotpeter from "A Report to an Academy" (1917), learns to speak, and to recite in public, as a way out from human predation. "No, it was not freedom I wanted. Just a way out; to the right, to the left, wherever" (Kafka, 2007, p. 80), Rotpeter maintains. Likewise, in *Mason & Dixon*, all dogs play the role of the tail-wagging, tale-telling Scheherazade, aping a human's idea of doggishness. Only their powers to amuse, the L.E.D. suggests, are "nightly delaying the Blades of our Masters by telling back to them tales of their humanity," to which he adds, preternaturally, "I am but an extreme Expression of this Process,—" (*MD*, p. 22). In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975), Deleuze and Guattari argue that Rotpeter makes "a stationary flight, a flight of intensity" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 13) in his movement towards human-ness, a change into a new condition. The flight of the "Learnèd D." (*MD*, p. 24), for his part, seems to involve the condition of doubling. Subdividing ontological space between super- and preternatural, he moves upward to that scopic overview, where, in a state of some exceptional aboveness he can name himself, like Linnaeus, or Adam (see Pratt, p. 32), yet remaining by the same token still an extreme example of doggishness below. Later in the narrative, for example, despite foppishly taunting some dockland dandies, the learned animal will immediately be strongly tempted by "the pure Edge of blood-love" (*MD*, p. 24) during a cock fight. Like Freud's gallows joke, the humour of the L.E.D. is his simultaneous occupation of the above and below. In the Dog's tale we experience not hybridity, but an interpenetration of spaces, a spatial pun. The Dog hence impinges upon Enlightenment knowledge-formation and world-picturing in the manner of a joke; a distortion in the scopic overview, or "overhearing." Wittily, discursively, and slightly impossibly, he is a Barthesian Scheherazade who tells us that we only hear the story because we are killing the teller.

The Learned D.'s anomaly is hence oddly ubiquitous: he is the necessary product of the grid, which cannot own up to why it produces the objects it does, or admit to the ground upon which it rests, a repression somewhat in the mode of the "traumatic kernel" that Slavoj Žižek notes of the commodity fetish in capitalism (Žižek, 1989, p. 45). In the current context, the L.E.D. draws our attention to other parts of the grid, the atlas linking to the system of nature, and the efforts required to spread that system around the world: the ideologies of the Atlantic slave trade for which the dog is a semi-fantastic figure. Writers like W.E.B. Du Bois and Franz Fanon, that is, figure the experiences of slavery and colony as doubled consciousness. Encountered at an English port and gateway to empire, Fang (as the dog turns out to be called!) exhibits similar feelings to those relayed by Franz Fanon in *Black Skins, White Masks* (1952) regarding the condition of colony and slavery: "The colonised is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle" (Fanon, 2008, p. 9), writes Fanon.

By inference, then, slavery is the unspeakable referent, or traumatic kernel of the dog's tale: the horror that Pynchon's writing seeks to address specifically with humour. If humour on one hand elevates and facilitates the lightness that any kind of life requires, on the other it registers the existence of a traumatic real, like a gravitational centre, or "shameful core" that the structuring social discourse wishes to mask or naturalise. A joke, as George Orwell suggested, is a "tiny revolution" overturning the status quo (Orwell, 1945, *np*). In this case, the complexity of Pynchon's humour of the L.E.D., like Kafka's Rotpeter, unsettlingly reveals "humanity" as a self-asserting discursive category achieved only by violence. The idea of a transcendental human-ness is, Pynchon suggests, merely a tale told to a certain kind of white power by its subalterns: a tale full of irony to which that power is oblivious.

Meanwhile, still aboard the deck of the South Tower in the early 1980s, Michel de Certeau considers the homology between the production of knowledge and the overweening expansiveness of viewpoint experienced as aboveness and paradigmatically as cartology. Both are positions that, for him, demote physicality and bodiliness, recasting the subject simply as a desiring eye, curiously powerful,

abstracted, a voyeur in the sky — the subject of what Adorno calls “peephole metaphysics” (Adorno, 1973, pp. 139-40). Perhaps this is why Pynchon accents animality in the passages described above; the persistence of the body, and of the body’s work, is set against conceptual abstraction. For Certeau, similarly, the map lends us the solar Eye, but only, he suggests, if we repress the materiality of map-making:

[I]f one takes the “map” in its current geographical form, we can see that in the course of the period marked by the birth of modern scientific discourse (i.e., from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century) the emphasis slowly disengaged itself from the itineraries that were the condition of its possibility (Certeau, 1984, p. 120).

Rather than represent the physical “tours” (p. 100), as Certeau puts it: the turns, or interactions with horizontal physical space that first made mapping possible, and the itineraries, traditions and instructions associated with these tours — “go this way, go that way, turn right at the Straits!” — and rather than reproduce the narratives and mimetic illustrations that accompanied early maps, showing sea monsters, desert scenes, et al., the maps of the eighteenth century and afterwards use geometry and mathematics to project all data onto the same plane, physically and epistemologically. Here, all that was once heterogeneous is made homogeneous, an extension of natural science and a scene whose producers have vanished: “The map [. . .] pushes away into its prehistory or into its posterity, as if into the wings, the operations of which it is the result or the necessary condition” (p. 121). Alongside the deracination of participatory elements, Certeau’s sense of totalisation implies the subjection of the world below by its projected representation from above; on the Enlightenment map, there’s no desire for spatial puns, or for interference from others. Even more than in the Linnaean system, then, we have in cartography an example of how verticality and power are intertwined: the map is always metaphorically, even ontologically above the territory in terms of hierarchies of knowledge.

Surveys and maps, with their power to produce, assess, and control social space, and with their close relationship to state, military, law, property, and

finance, are central to the operations of capital and imperium. *Mason & Dixon* presents us with a map that produces and negotiates populations, social practices, and human subjects too, if we think of the epistemologies of race that occur conterminously with the direct territorial markings the Line inscribes. Pynchon's narrative shows us the complex connotations of drawing the apparently simple figure of a straight line, echoing Olsson's reminder that simplicity is deceptive: "What is the drawing of a line if it is not also the creation of new objects?"

The Mason-Dixon Line divides the colonial provinces between 1763 and 1767, an action performed following a long-delayed judgment from Chancery in London regarding the competing American land ownership claims of the Penn family and Lord Calvert. Overdetermined by the multiple, asymmetrical, and diverse processes and structures of colony, capital, geometry, astronomy, geography, and law, the Line of the novel articulates transatlantic property rights underwritten by a British court and as they direct New World landlords within the purview of the Crown, all executed with a graphic and geodesic accuracy drawn from the stars themselves. Pynchon's novel provides a striking example of how the above conditions the below and the territory is physically and literally aligned with the map. The map is a vital, almost alchemical technology for the transformation of space.

Mason and Dixon themselves are, as noted, simply commissioned workers, along with their team of axe-men. The Line has life because of this: "Well! of course it's a living creature, 'tis all of us, temporarily collected into an Entity, whose Labors none could do alone," Mason scolds (*MD*, p. 678). Perhaps he doesn't recognise the Line as also the life-like fetish of animated capital, in the manner of Marx's dancing wooden table. Pile and Rose tell us, on the other hand, about the creepy, persistent presence of the mapmaker: the very "notion of map-able space," they suggest, polemically, going behind even what Certeau suggests, "involves a specific epistemic topography; a landscape, a form of knowing or seeing which denies its structuring by the gaze of white male bourgeois knowers on Other knowns" (Pile and Rose, 1992, p. 131). Fittingly for a novel concerned with the multiple mechanisms of a bourgeois class, like professional societies and transnational corporations, Pynchon's tale of the Line confirms and yet complicates Pile and Rose's suspicions regarding such a direct gaze of power, and

such a monolithic landscape. His text suggests that while maps and map-able space may well serve the interests of Pile and Rose's many "knowers", the operations producing both maps and space occur only in mystified, mediated, complex ways, through accident and design, interrelated institutions and networks - some secret, some overt - and using workers both intellectual and manual. So just as the novel unpacks the richness of the biographies of the players, it is also at pains to show the many discursive nets and networks producing the social space they occupy; in this sense, the text is a kind of map, one that extrapolates endless complexity and history from the simplicity of line, pulling ever downwards.

Lest we imagine that the cartological completely erases the territorial, we may turn to Henri Lefebvre's helpful comments that "[n]o space ever vanishes utterly leaving no trace. [. . .] Were it otherwise, there would be no 'interpenetration,' whether of spaces, rhythms, or polarities" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 164). Where Farinelli's punning landscapes imply multiple discursive agents, Lefebvre thinks more about the palimpsestic nature, or multiple occupancy of space. Pynchon's novel shares with its predecessor *Vineland* (1990) an interest in the socio-geological aspects of America, the earlier novel digging down to the Yuroks hidden in the landscape of Northern California, and to whatever preceded *them*. In *Vineland*, the Seventh River becomes,

[. . .] what for the Yuroks it had always been, a river of ghosts. Everything had a name—fishing and snaring places, acorn grounds, rocks in the river, boulders on the banks, groves and single trees with their own names, springs, pools, meadows, all alive, each with its own spirit (Pynchon, 1990, p. 186).

The bucolic mode we note in this passage relies on Pynchon's ventriloquism of Yurok culture, ghost-writing the latter as much as the Native Americans themselves ghost-write and name their landscape, imbuing objects with spirit in sharp distinction to the secular Linnaean model of nature. Where Western mapping asserts above-ness, here there is the levelness of the river. So

another humour, then, seems possible, where levity, or upwardness, to recall Freud, is about relinquishing the gravity of the fixture of meaning, generating an openness to the possibility of other spaces, other readings of space.

Late in *Mason & Dixon*, the Iroquois Warrior Path running perpendicular to the Line, one of many Native American meridian boundaries constructed by the tribes (*MD*, 674), is described by Cherrycoke, as a “Membrane that divides their [Iroquois] Subjunctive World from our number’d and dreamless Indicative” (*MD*, p. 677). Subjunctivity, a key trope in the novel, suggests in this case diverse orders of mapping, differentiating the pre-modern Warrior Path from the indicative Lines determined by number, astronomy and sector: by “the above” and “the along.” The fragile Warrior Path is due to be destroyed, of course, by the force and organisation of the Line, and other lines, over the years until the frontier closes. New lines would soon include the Northwest Ordinance of 1785, surveying the vast territory lying west of Pennsylvania and north of the Ohio River to the Great Lakes. Many more would follow. The most cited passage in Pynchon’s novel picks up on this, noting how territory to the west is transformed by the survey and map:

[S]een and recorded, measur’d and tied in, back into the Net-Work of Points already known, that slowly triangulates its Way into the Continent, changing all from subjunctive to declarative, reducing Possibilities to Simplicities that serve the ends of Governments,— winning away from the realm of the Sacred, its Borderlands one by one, and assuming them unto the bare mortal World that is our home, and our Despair (*MD*, p. 345).

The pathos and irony of this passage is not merely that the Native American meridians are already a sophisticated transport and communication system “connected upon a Scale Continental, that nothing we know of in North Britain can equal” (p. 674); Freer notes that “Western science could learn a lot from such people” (Freer, 2018, p. 389). Rather, the passage considers the question of *what* is mapped, or even *map-able*. Like Certeau’s mimetic sea monsters, pre- or early modern cartography, or that of indigenous people, includes iconography, myth and practice, like the Sacred and its Borderlands, that does not register as facticity

(the indicative) in a Eurocentric sense at all (see Pickles, 2004, p. 14). What counts as map-able? Can you map the Sacred, or a feeling, or a state, or a movement?

We are reminded immediately of Pratt's comment that the Linnaean system overwrites other accounts of place and space; other knowledges. While Pynchon's juxtaposition of "sacred" and "bare mortal" spaces erects rather a crude distinction between the absolute space of the Native – the native as indissociable from the land, etc. – and the fallen, despairing, yet eminently quantifiable space of modern existence, the relationship is complicated further by the quotation further above: the Warrior Path, beyond or even *upon* the membrane or screen that occludes the Western eye, occupies a space of *dream*, wherever that is, and whoever's dream it is supposed to be.

Following Freud, Lefebvre imagines dream-space as "different from the space of language, though of the same order," noting that dream is where wishes are "proclaimed" (Lefebvre, 2008, p. 209). Dream, in Pynchon's terms, is exactly the realm of the subjunctive. In the opening lines to the long citation above, and part of an ongoing theme in the writer's fiction of America as European dream, *Mason & Dixon's* narrator wonders:

Does Brittania, when she sleeps, dream? Is America her dream?— in which all that cannot pass in the metropolitan Wakefulness is allow'd Expression away in the restless Slumber of these Provinces, and on West-ward, wherever 'tis not yet mapp'd, nor written down, nor ever, by the majority of Mankind, seen,— serving as a very Rubbish-Tip for subjunctive Hopes, for all that *may yet be true*,— (*MD*, p. 345)

This lateral, bi-continental, even planetary model of the conscious and unconscious, to recall Pratt, provides a live conduit between the metropolitan real or centre (the real City of London, conscious metropolitan Wakefulness); its effacement or displacement in colony (the restless "Slumber of these Provinces," "not yet mapp'd"); and the wishful, erotic subjunctive (the Rubbish-Tip that is not really one; the site of desire, the illegitimate, the unreal, or the not-yet-real, the not-yet-mapped). The magical Warrior Path, with its Native traffic, perhaps as the

emblem of the terrain in which the colonist finds him/herself, may be the image of the colonial dreamer, manifested on the screen of the closed eye, or, like the Schwarzkommando from *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), it may really be there, containing resistant Others, occupying the circuit, providing erotic friction. As Pratt suggests, "empires create in the imperial centre of power an obsessive need to present and re-present its peripheries and its others continually to itself. It becomes dependent on its others to know itself" (Pratt, 2008, p. 4). One might see this logic reproduced in the re-doubled imperium of colonial America, as the colonial eye fetishises the otherness of the Iroquois, or simply the idea of their otherness.

In any of these cases, Lefebvre's sense of the interpenetration of spaces becomes a focus of Pynchon's novel. The indicative Western map, which displays what Western cartology has decreed visible, and the dream map, which displays what the indicative cannot or won't see, mingle promiscuously in the passages cited above, and in Pynchon's text more widely. Indeed, if as Lefebvre suggests, language and dream share an order, *Mason & Dixon* is inevitably itself somewhat of a dream-narrative, told by Cherrycoke, himself a Scheherazade, in thrall to his brother. It is a narrative punctuated by *mises-en-abyme*, anachronism, and anomaly, and, as noted above, it forms an obverse to the abstract concision of the Line, incorporating forbidden or *recherché* materials from many knowledges, refusing the gravitas of any fixed cartology. In its mode of critique too, the novel deals with dream; the displacements and disavowals that facilitate the slave trade, as we saw, and that allow Western society mistakenly to consider itself the epitome of the human.

In the section of *Mason & Dixon* set in Britain, we encounter one of the more remarkable instances of aboveness: Emerson's (not *that* one) flying lessons, in which Dixon partakes, and which are conducted along ley-lines. Surely a salute to, and gentle parody of all kinds of pre-modern knowledge, this subjunctive mode of travel sees past an Enlightenment construction of time and space to a virtual, utopian one, composed only of potential. Once aloft, Emerson remarks, "Map-space, origins, destinations, any Termini, hardly seem to matter,- one can apprehend all at once the entire plexity of possible journeys, set as one is above Distance, above Time itself" (*MD*, p. 505). This is a much different kind of above,

figuring a wholly different kind of space. Later, in a subjunctive America, flying by ley-lines is again dreamed, but the narrator warns us against looking up into the heavens: “seiz’d by its proper Vertigo, [one may] fall into the sky” (*MD*, pp. 650-1), we are told. This affecting sense of the allure of skyspace and its magnetism, as it pulls us counter-intuitively upwards, reminds us of the humourist, who rises above themselves, rather than the mapmaker. But this passage surely cautions against too much giddiness, as though the latter were a kind of death-drive too, relinquishing engagement with the world, the terrain, and the map.

It is characteristic of Pynchon’s work to provide sites of resistance to power, or momentary oases within dangerous territories. Sam Thomas, for example, reads the “magical plane” to which the novel so frequently alludes in terms of Adorno and Horkheimer’s consideration of mimesis: “it is precisely this ‘magical plane’ that enlightened reason systematically erodes (one of the last refuges, though not necessarily a viable one, of the ‘nonidentical’)” (Thomas, 2007, p. 12), he notes. Thomas is wary of assigning to magic a really emancipatory function in Pynchon’s novel, however, as is Jarvis, who reads the author as too ready to offer “symbolic resolution” to political problems by referring to subversive or subaltern discourses. *Mason & Dixon* falters, for him, in its “reversion to a mystical narrative register” (Jarvis, 1998, p. 78).

Yet, on the account I have provided, the novel’s magic is far from mystical; rather, it enacts a decolonisation of space, drawing elements from many cultural sources that demonstrate the space of America is not just obviously heterotopic, but the notion that a geography with wit contains utopian potential too. The novel itself is an example of just such a geography (and it composes a history likewise aslant). In his attention to a dialectic of cartography, Pynchon delivers the counterweight to the Line right at the end of the narrative. At the end of *Mason & Dixon*, Dixon produces a map sublimely celebrating the below: “fragrant, elegantly cartouch’d with Indians and Instruments [. . .]. Ev’ry place they ran it, ev’ry House pass’d by, Road cross’d, the Ridge-lines and Creeks, Forests and Glades, Water ev’rywhere, and the Dragon nearly visible.” “Emerson was right, Jeremiah,” says Mason, “You were flying, all the time” (*MD*, p. 689).

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